



## The Role of Women Translators in the History of Translation in Iran\*

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THE position and role of women in Iran's society have long been an intriguing subject of research. Although Iranian women have always been influential in art and literature, their prominence in Iranian literature has significantly increased during the last decades. The powerful presence of female authors indicates a change in their social position. In the past, women strived to establish their place in literature and writing through translation, which was an introduction for their current status. The present research aims to study the history of works translated by women to answer the following questions: To which social classes do women translators belong? Why have they chosen translation as their career? What are their mainsprings? What are the main topics of their translations? The contemporary history of women translators can be generally divided into three periods: firstly, the "hidden presence" which is between 1900 and 1930 and coincides with the end of the Qajar dynasty, the Constitutional Revolution of Iran, and the beginning of Pahlavi dynasty. During this period, a few numbers of women were literate because there were no schools for them, and they studied at home.

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At the end of Qajar reign, women could go to religious schools, and gradually several all-girls schools were established. However, most women from the royalty and upper-social class had the chance to enter them. Some women started to translate texts. Lady Kulthum was the first woman who translated a version of "One Thousand and One Nights" from Arabic into Persian together with his husband. In 1905, the first woman translated a play from Turkish into Persian independently and, in this way, the play entered the Persian Language. In 1909, the first women's weekly was published which included articles on the family, housekeeping, cooking as well as translations from Arabic, French, and English to Persian. Generally, only a few women translated texts in this period. However, after Reza Shah rose to power, women's social status changed and was reinforced. More women started to write and translate for journals and the press. Parvin Etesami was the first female poet whose poems were published; in this period, the Biography of Mary Curry and the book *The Soul of Women* were translated by two female translators.

The second period of the contemporary history of women's translation was named "contested presence", starting from the 1940s and lasting until the Islamic Revolution of Iran. During this period, important historical events occurred. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi became the king and took power from his father. British and Russian military forces dominated the country; however, more women went to school, and the girls of the upper-class went to bilingual schools. Literary books were translated from English, German and Russian into Persian and few books were also published about childcare and also children's literature. Most translators were among the noble class of the society and were studying at bilingual schools. Simin Daneshvar is one of the most famous of such translators. She translated two novels, one from George Bernard Shaw, *The Chocolate Soldier*, and the other from Anton Chekhov, *The Duel*. Many works were translated during the 1950s and, despite the unrests; women continued their efforts in this field. It was in this period that Forough Farokhzad, a modernist poet, published her collection of poems. Women translated several books with different topics in this period.

The third period which is called "the professional presence" began in 1979 and lasted up to the present. The two main events of this period were the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the war between Iran and Iraq. In spite of all the socioeconomic changes, women's literacy underwent remarkable growth in this period. The number of self-help books translated in different areas, from children's literature to medical texts, increased significantly. Besides, women translators came to translate texts with new topics. The level of women's education led to their professional presence.

Comparing the situation of women translators in Iran with that of the West, we find more or less the same trends and similarities but occurring at different times, sometimes with a few centuries of delay. In translation, like many other spheres of social or intellectual life, women have not been treated the same as men. In the West, during the middle ages and the Renaissance, translation was the only socially acceptable writing practice for women. Sometimes, women were allowed to translate only religious texts; English society is a prime example here. The works translated by a woman were generally published under cover of anonymity. If one learned that a woman had done a translation, the manuscript hardly would come out of their circle of intimates. The continuous struggle and battle for the recognition and dissemination of the writings produced by women lasted for centuries in the West. Another point that highlights the history of the translation during the Renaissance is the literal and word-for-word characteristic of the translations made by the female translators. Researchers suggest that the literal translation provided women with more protection and reduced their personal responsibility for their translations. To compare the financial and economic situation of women translators in Iran and the West, we can see that in the West, although translation responded to the needs for the translator's self-assertion, it remained - and perhaps primarily - a source of income for the female translators. We know that most of the female translators were from the penniless nobility who were faced with the vagaries of history. Thus, the financial aspects of the translation played a key role for the women translators. Family reputation and network of the female translators were also extremely important in getting their works published. Women would face great hardship finding publishers if they were not related to ministerial families or did not have an eminent family name. On top of these problems, women had to overcome the reluctance of men to accept their scientific skills.

This paper shows that there is a close relationship between the selection of translated texts, the historical settings, and the level of women's education. Children literature was the most desirable field of translation for women in the past, and most works have been translated from English to Persian. In the end, it should be noted that, in addition to women's growing presence in the society, they have played an important role in changing the attitudes of men and society towards women's mental and intellectual abilities.

**Keywords**— Women, Translator, Author, History, Iran

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